

- Federal Aid Also Available to Dutchess, Putnam and Rockland Counties -

Washington, DC – Today U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) applauded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) designation of Orange County as a primary natural disaster area due to losses caused by severe flooding this April. Because they are contiguous, Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan and Ulster counties are also eligible for disaster aid.

"Hudson Valley's farmers have had nothing but bad luck, bad harvests and bad weather including three '50-year' floods that have occurred in the past few years," said Hall. "USDA's decision is a beneficial step that should help the farmers of Orange County receive much needed and much deserved assistance. We need to do all we can to make sure that our local farmers remain viable. The aid available under this declaration can make an important contribution toward this goal."

The declaration makes all qualified farmers in the counties eligible for low interest emergency loans from USDA's Farm Service Agency. The farmers have eight months from the date of declaration to apply for loans to help cover part of their actual losses.

Yesterday Hall called on the USDA to forgive any balances on outstanding federal loans that were taken out by onion growers in New York's Black Dirt region following severe weather and crop damage in the summer of 1996. The loans were taken out in large part as a result of inconsistent or contradictory policy guidance from the USDA.

"While these low-interest federal loans are welcome and helpful, they're only going to add to the weight of debt that some Black Dirt growers are already suffering under from the 1990s," said Hall. "Farmers shouldn't have to pay for the USDA's mistake which forced them to take out these loans over a decade ago."

Additional information about USDA assistance can be [found online here](#) .